



**BY JAMIE BAXTER**

**T**his year has been a very frustrating year for career and technical education (CTE) advocates across the country. We have experienced significant funding reductions for the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), not to mention the cuts in state and local CTE funding. While policymakers continue to talk about the skill gap and the need to create jobs, we all just want to scream, "CTE is the answer!" Well, it is about time that we do indeed scream; that we scream louder and longer than we ever have before; and that we find ways to bring other screaming voices with us. We need to ensure that



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policymakers understand the importance of CTE programs in developing a skilled workforce—and that we need funding to support these programs. We all know how important funds are for our programs, yet we don't always feel the need to stand up and scream. Why?

It is important to know that you *can* make a difference. The folks whom *you* elect into office are there to serve *you*. They are there to hear your complaints and to address them accordingly. If they fail to do this, then it is your right to take away your vote. This is powerful. Members of the House of Representatives are elected every two years. That means that they are constantly in campaign mode and seeking how they can win your vote. It is up to you to tell them how they can win your vote: by supporting CTE.

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ACTE regularly meets with Members of Congress on Capitol Hill. We provide information on CTE and its value, and use examples from the Member's state and district to make the case that CTE is effective. A Member of Congress is most concerned about CTE programs in his or her congressional district, including

how many students are enrolled, what businesses are involved, how funding cuts have impacted services, and what effective programs and practices exist in the communities they serve. While we can provide a snapshot of information, we cannot provide all the details and anecdotes needed to describe what is really

happening in every congressional district. This is why *you* need to get involved and tell the story. You need to explain to Congress how the budget cuts are impacting your programs and students. Members of Congress need to see how their decisions

in Washington impact people back home.

Being an effective advocate is not easy. But with the right tools, you can step up your efforts and become a strong voice for CTE. The following are a few ideas and tools to help you be successful.

## E-mail and Phone Calls

When ACTE sends out a legislative alert, most times it asks you to call your Member of Congress. Phone calls are the most effective way to reach out to U.S. Representatives' and Senators' offices when a vote is pending. If you have a pre-existing relationship with the education or labor staff person (or the Member of Congress), then you can bypass this step and e-mail or call the person you know. But for the average advocate, a phone call to the policymaker's office is likely to be noticed and taken note of.

While it is true that some congressional offices view the e-mail accounts on a regular basis and take notes outlining the constituents' concerns, not all offices do this. I have heard from staff that some offices only check their general account about once a month. So, if you are trying to get an opinion noticed for an upcoming vote, the congressional office may not see your message until after the fact. During the year, if you have less time-sensitive materials, it is perfectly fine to use the general e-mail box. In fact, ACTE has an action center on its Web site ([www.acteonline.org](http://www.acteonline.org)) that can direct you to your U.S. Representative's and Senators' e-mail accounts. All you do is enter your zip code; we provide the rest of the information, along with current talking points to help you draft the most effective message possible.

## In-person Meetings

Phone calls and e-mails are great, but if you want to build a strong relationship with a congressional office, in-person meetings are the best way to do that. Every year, ACTE hosts its National Policy Seminar. During this meeting, ACTE staff provides attendees with information on the current happenings in Washington and set time aside for you to meet with Members of Congress. If you are unable to come to Washington, legislators are in their home states and districts at numerous times throughout the year. Contact



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their district offices to find out when they will be in town so you can schedule a meeting during that time. Whether you are in Washington or in one of the district offices, often you will meet with the education or labor staff. This staff member's job is to focus on education and/or labor programs, which means that his or her level of knowledge may be higher than that of the Member of Congress. The staff member will take notes and share them with the legislator; this can be just as effective as meeting with the legislator. Keep this staff member's contact information handy, so you can share information on CTE throughout the year. Meeting face to face is a great way to begin to build your relationship with that office, and will provide you with the contacts to effectively e-mail or call that office with specific concerns related to CTE.

## Site Visits

A lot of Members of Congress are not calling for CTE support because they don't understand what CTE means to their respective communities. It is up to you to educate them on the importance of CTE to states and districts. ACTE provides overall information on CTE; however, you need to make legislators aware of the impact of their decisions on CTE, specifically as it relates to your school and state. Invite policymakers and their staff to visit your program, and be sure to tell them that without their support and without federal resources, these programs would not be able to address workforce needs that are supporting the economy. Members of Congress need to understand how their decisions, specifically on funding, will impact folks at the local levels. Educate them by showing them exactly what CTE is doing at the state and local levels.

## Strength in Numbers

The more people contacting a Member of Congress, the more likely the Member is going to support the issue. It is crucial

that you gather as many supporters as you can find to help you in your advocacy efforts. One area that you may not think of, but could have the largest impact on, is local business. Many CTE programs partner with local employers. Take advantage of this relationship and ask those businesses to contact Congress to ask for an increase in funding. Once policymakers see how important these programs are to helping local employers remain in business, they are more likely to support CTE. Develop a list of area businesses, alumni, parents, administrators and other CTE supporters that you can activate to help build the support for CTE. If all of these people contact Congress, then we can effectively express how important CTE is to each community. If an entire CTE community stands up and asks

Congress to fund CTE through Perkins, it becomes very difficult to ignore us. Together we can make an impact and help fund CTE programs. Congress will know that CTE works!

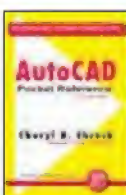
If you ever need additional information or tips, please feel free to contact me in the Public Policy Department at the Association for Career and Technical Education. **T**

**Jamie Baxter**

is advocacy manager for the Association for Career and Technical Education. She can be contacted at [jbaxter@acteonline.org](mailto:jbaxter@acteonline.org).

Interested in exploring this topic further? Discuss it with your colleagues on the ACTE forums at [www.acteonline.org/forum.aspx](http://www.acteonline.org/forum.aspx).

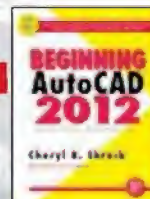
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